

MARXIST ATTITUDES TO SOCIAL REVOLUTION, 1946-1948 *

Anthony Reid

For the *PKI* leaders in the 1950s, the failure of the Indonesian revolution was partly attributable to the failure of the communist party itself. In the period prior to the adoption of the *Jalan Baru* policy of August 1948, the party had trusted too much in the Indonesian national bourgeoisie and too little in the international forces of socialism; it had lost its freedom of organization and failed to stress sufficiently its work among peasants and its activity among soldiers and workers in the Dutch-occupied zone. (1) This judgement might appear posthumously to justify Tan Malaka's policies, and to sustain the view that a more radical *PKI* line might have succeeded in resolving Java's rural problems along lines analogous to China or Vietnam.

Leaving aside the external question whether the great powers and the Outer Islands would have allowed such a revolution to succeed in Java, this is in some respects an attractive suggestion. It needs to be examined far more carefully than it has been, however, in particular by research into the reasons for communist defeat after the adoption of the *Jalan Baru* in late 1948. By laying all the blame for the 'Madiun affair' at the feet of the Hatta government, public *PKI* analyses of the revolution have sidestepped this issue altogether.

Marxist 'Conservatism', 1946-1947

The spontaneous populist upheavals and *daulat* operations of 1945-1946 did in fact obtain support and encouragement from local-level communists. The *PKI* founded by Mr Jusuf in October 1945 had a programme of nationalizing land and all key enterprises, and introducing pure socialism. "The social revolution is the only way

* Some of the material in this paper is expressed in a broader context in my The Indonesian National Revolution, 1945-1950, (Melbourne, Longman, 1974).

(1) D.N.Aidit, Lahirnja PKI dan Perkembangannja, (Jakarta, 1955), pp. 27-34.

to eliminate and destroy the exploitation of the common people", it declared. (2) Branches of the party in South Sumatra and East Sumatra in late 1945 had a more opportunistic, but hardly less radical, policy. Communist, to many of those involved in the social revolutionary wave, meant 'super-revolutionary'; *revolusioner yang konsekwen*; the readiness not only to talk revolution but to act it.

The 'international' Marxists who rallied to the Sjahrir-Amir Sjarifuddin government at the end of 1945, however, took a generally dim view of disturbances which sullied the good name of the Republic abroad. As their critics complained, they had more confidence in the progressive nature of the post-war European governments than in the revolutionary potential of Indonesian society. The weight which this group threw against the 'social revolutions' and other disturbances was a very large factor in the reestablishment of some measure of bureaucratic control in Java and Sumatra.

In taking this position the 'international' Marxists in the government had no difficulty finding orthodox justification for their position. The arrival of Dutch communist party members Abdulmadjid Djojoadiningrat, Setiadjit, and Maruto Darusman, convinced and experienced exponents of the common front against fascism, provided an authoritative vocabulary. It was they in the first instance who denounced Tan Malaka as a Trotskyist, deepening the gulf between him and the Marxists in the government. It was they too who enabled government leaders to denounce worker control of factories and plantations with the unanswerable catch-phrase 'anarcho-syndicalism'. Amir Sjarifuddin pleaded with workers to support the government and allow its agents to run these installations, for as Lenin had said, the state was "the instrument for destroying every effort of the capitalists". (3)

Amir Sjarifuddin and Abdulmadjid Djojoadiningrat flew to Medan in a British plan to try to restore order in the wake of the 'social revolution' there. Amir pleaded with the militant revolution-

(2) Benedict Anderson, Java, in a time of Revolution, Occupation, and Resistance, 1944-1946, (Ithaca, 1972), p. 218.

(3) Amir Sjarifuddin's speech of 8 June 1946, as cited in J.O. Sutter, Indonesianisasi: Politics in a changing Economy, 1940-1955, (Ithaca, 1955), Volume II, p. 378.

aries of East Sumatra:

"As a Marxist and a leader of the Socialist party I want an egalitarian society with fair distribution. But every theoretician of revolution must accept that that struggle and aspiration must be attained in stages... Mao Tze Tung once said: 'Our struggle now must be directed to the first phase, with the second phase delayed for the time being.' "(4)

The *pemuda*, Amir went on to complain, tend to be preoccupied with the romanticism and heroism of their own struggle, but they should not think the peasants any less heroic for getting on with the job.

The Marxists in government believed they should concentrate on power rather than policy during the initial stage of the revolution. Apart from some democratization of local government soon after coming to power, the internal policies of the Marxist-led governments of 1946-1947 were remarkable for their caution. Relatively conservative members of the *PNI* and *MASJUMI* monopolized the economics and finance ministries. The programme enunciated by the *Sayap Kiri*, *SOBSI* and the *BTI* (*Barisan Tani Indonesia* - Indonesian Peasant Front) during 1946-1947 were mildly reformist, seeking only nationalization of the largest banks, utilities, and a few key branches of production. There were no serious plans for land reform, beyond the periodic demand for abolition of the *conversie-recht* within the old *vorstenlanden* - a demand which arose from the grassroots rather than from the party.

Until 1948 then, the attitude of the mainstream Marxist leadership in Indonesia was firmly against mixing social revolution with the basic formula for national revolution, especially if this was likely to involve chaos and bloodshed. Any systematic attack on the hierarchic structure of rural society had to be postponed.

Reforms in the desa, 1946-1948

The orbit of the central Republican government's own authority, in central Java, corresponded with one of the most hierarchically organized areas in Indonesia. The period 1946-1948 saw reforms in two areas of Javanese rural life - village government and the *conversie-recht*. In both cases this was the result of pressure from below giving rise to very limited legislative reform at the top.

(4) Soeloeh Merdeka (Medan), 10 April 1946.

The colonial order had rewarded the Javanese village elite, the *pamong desa*, not with salary but with the usufruct of land, in a systematization of older feudal practice. When added to the personal property of his family, the *tanah bengkok* (official land) of the *lurah* (village head) was sufficiently extensive to give him a wealth and status far above that of the ordinary villager. The minor *pamong desa* generally enjoyed a *bengkok* allocation less than a tenth that of the *lurah*. Although the Dutch had introduced elections by landholders, these occurred only at the death of the incumbent *lurah*, and rarely did more than confirm the succession of his son.

In the months after Japan's defeat became known in rural Java, many *lurahs* were forced out of office. The way in which pressure was mobilized has been described in one case. (5)

"Shortly after the fall of Japan, a Tamansari villager.... returned to deliver his (rice) quota and was called before the *lurah*. The villager insisted that, since the Japanese government had fallen, there was no longer any obligation to deliver quotas. An argument developed and the *lurah* struck him... The event immediately became a *cause célèbre* and was converted by the *lurah's* opposition into an issue with which to force his dismissal. A mass meeting of the whole *kalurahan* (village)... unleashed the resentments of the preceding few years, and the leaders at the meeting were in vigorous agreement that Hadji Daran should be dismissed. The district office in Modjokuto accepted the decision, Daran resigned, and a new election was held."

Even though duplicated all over Java, such actions implied no necessary structural change. Very frequently the unpopular *lurah* simply retired in favour of his son. Where there was sufficient upheaval to bring about a switch from one leading family to another, this was usually because a *santri* candidate used the opportunity to unseat an *abangan* incumbent, or vice-versa. In such cases the villagers sometimes successfully demanded a reduction of the *lurah's* *bengkok*, the source of his dominance in the village, and a distribution of the surplus among landless peasants. This represented reform of the system, not revolution; its significance lay in demonstrating the capacity for action of the generally quiescent Javanese peasant mass.

Since organized revolutionary politics had not yet reached

(5) Robert Jay, Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java, (New Haven, 1963), p. 69.

the villages, utilization of this capacity for permanent change was dependent on the existing conservative bureaucracy. The maximum that could be achieved in these conditions is apparent in the special region of Yogyakarta, where the local prestige and power of Sultan Hamengkubuwono and his closeness to the national political elite made revolution from above possible. In April 1946 the Yogyakarta government announced that new elections would be held for lurah, pamong desa, and a legislative council in each desa. Three or four villages were grouped together to form a larger desa community thought capable of supporting a council, after which elections for the enlarged villages were held during 1947. A ceiling of 4 hectares irrigated or 6 hectares unirrigated land was placed on the new lurah's bengkok - an area still at least ten times the average peasant holding. (6) Bengkok above this limit was declared common village property (*kas desa*) whose product should be used on village projects.

These Yogyakarta reforms were the maximum achieved by the revolution in the Javanese village. The central government declined in November 1945 to extend its democratic reforms to the village level after a defence of traditional Javanese *adat* (customary law) by some members. Several Residents and *bupatis* did order elections of new lurahs in order to head off the wave of actions from below. Viewed in perspective, however, the structural changes introduced into the village by the revolution were at most an updating of a powerful tradition. The disappearance of unquestioning acceptance of lurah authority, noted by Jay in 1953-1954 (7) was a more fundamental product of revolutionary politics, but it has not proved to be permanent.

The other major area of peasant pressure on the Republican Government in Yogyakarta was that of agricultural estates. The major cash-crops of the central Java region - sugar, tobacco, and, as a wartime expedient, cotton - were grown on peasant land in alternation with the peasants' own rice crops. For peasants in areas affected by these plantation crops, the right to do as they pleased with their land, free of the conditions imposed by Dutch estates under colonial government, was the real essence of independence. Only in such areas

(6) 1 hectare = 2.47 acres. The village studied by Jay (*ibid.* p. 44) had also reduced the lurah's bengkok to 5 hectares. Only 153 of its 735 families held more than one hectare in 1953. Larger bengkoks are still common in other areas.

(7) Jay, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

ere they had a common, clear-cut objective, did peasants give
 ive support to the BTI. The BTI was initially dominated by
 llowers of Sjahrir and remained loyal to the government until the
 lit in the Socialist Party (*PSI*), when communist influence began to
 inate. In general the politicians who led it were free to form-
 ate whatever pro-government policies they wished, but on the issue
 the estate lands there was consistent pressure for change from
 low.

The first victory of the BTI was in the Madiun Residency in
 rch 1946. With the Resident's approval all existing leases between
 e estates and the peasants for the planting of estate crops were
 ncelled. New leases were drawn up for the 1946-1947 planting year
 terms drafted by the BTI itself. The main concentration of sugar,
 acco and cotton estates, however, was in the former princely lands
 Surakarta and Yogyakarta. Special legislation for these areas in
 18 had recognized individual peasant rights to land, where previous-
 all land had been regarded as the property of the ruler. Peasant
 ghts were limited, however, in lands suitable for sugar, by the
 ler's continued *conversie-recht* (right of conversion), whereby he
 uld arrange the lease of peasant land in his domain to estates on an
 ternating basis with peasant crops. The boards set up to administer
 gar and other estates in the name of the Republic continued to oper-
 e on the basis of this law of 1918.

Peasants in the Yogyakarta area brought the issue forcibly to
 e government's attention in April 1946 by destroying cane and
 ocking irrigation channels on land planted in sugar. The Yogyakarta
 gional government made some minor concessions and promised a new
 w regulating estates within three years. In early 1948 demands
 thered momentum again, this time centred in the Klaten kabupaten of
 rakarta, the biggest concentration of sugar land. The BTI, now
 presented in the *BP-KNIP*, pressed for the abolition of the *conversie-*
cht. When discussion of the issue was cut short by a Presidential
 cree of 3 March regulating *conversie* for the coming year, the BTI
 ganized a very effective series of peasant demonstrations throughout
 rakarta and Yogyakarta, culminating on 1 April. The *BP-KNIP* hurried-
 passed law number 13 of 26 April 1948, annulling those sections of
 e 1918 law relating to *conversie*. In theory this made farm owners
 lly masters of their land, though doing nothing for the landless
 asants who had provided most of the demonstrators. The effect was
 so counter-balanced by a decree imposing on lurahs the obligation of
 suring that sufficient cash crops were produced to meet the govern-
 nt's needs. Nevertheless this did amount to a meaningful and
 pular land reform, a unique example of government response to

peasant pressure. Land reform was not part of any of the government programmes, and the BTI itself had no specific proposals beyond this one.

The Communists move Left, 1948

The Marxists' fall from power in January 1948 naturally brought a radicalization in their attitude to the revolution, which was reinforced by international developments. The international dimensions of this problem have been very well discussed by Ruth McVey. Here I wish only to focus on communist policy towards the rural problem in Java during 1948. This is of special interest because it was the only attempt by national-level political leaders during the revolution to provide radical solutions from above to the problems of the Javanese village.

The agitation of early 1948 for the abolition of the *conversie-recht* already showed *FDR* (*Front Demokrasi Rakyat* - later merged into an enlarged PKI) leaders the potential for political action from a peasant base. The next step along the same path was a rural strike at Delanggu, between Surakarta and Klaten. This was the heart of the same estate belt which had produced earlier protests.

The strike appears to have begun with purely local and specific grievances, in a sack-making factory and cotton-plantation at Delanggu. Responsibility for both enterprises was in the hands of the government-appointed *Badan Tekstil Negara* (State Textile Agency) in Surakarta, against which an initial demonstration had been organized on 19 May. Over 500 Delanggu workers, organized by the local BTI and *SARBUPRI* (Plantation Workers Union) branches, descended on Surakarta to press their demands. They argued that inflation had reduced their wages to a fifth of the appropriate level, yet they received no rice and cloth allowance like other civil servants. In addition they demanded union representation in the BTN. When the demands were not fully met, the sack factory workers and 17,000 *SARBUPRI* members on Delanggu plantations began their strike on 26 May. Interrupted for abortive negotiations on 1 June, the strike began again on 23 June. By this time the national *SOBSI* leadership had come out in strong support of the strikers, (8) while the *MASJUMI* Minister of Prosperity

- (8) On 21 June *SOBSI* explained its support of strike action by arguing that the appropriate internal policy in a national revolution was anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. *SOBSI* therefore authorized "strikes which take the form of corrective-constructive action towards elements which endanger the national revolution." Buruh, 22 June 1948.

had entered the negotiations on the side of management. MASJUMI sent its peasant union affiliate, *STII*, into Delanggu to work the idle fields, which by 10 July had led to some nasty clashes with strikers and at least one death. Before the strike was settled in favour of the workers on 16 July, units of the West Java Siliwangi Division and the Tentara Pelajar had come to the defence of the *STII*, occupying several villages of Delanggu. (9)

Delanggu was another demonstration of the power the FDR could mobilize by supporting peasant demands. It inaugurated a series of FDR-backed strikes among organized workers. Delanggu also demonstrated for the first time, however, the dangers to which political polarization in the Javanese village could lead. At the grassroots the conflict between *STII* and *BTI* was no longer one of national politics or international ideology, but of the clash of two cultures, *santri* and *abangan*.

The above two issues had involved only those peasants involved in estate production of sugar and cotton - the backbone of *BTI* strength. The Marxists were at last moving, however, towards an attack on the hierarchic village structure itself. At the end of June Supeno complained in the *PESINDO* weekly *Revolusioner*, "Up until today we have never given attention to the peasants and workers as basic revolutionary forces. What we have fed them with has been nothing but high-sounding words." (10) The previous week the same journal had attacked "the general assumption which has changed little, that the *desa* has a static character which can with difficulty be changed." (11) Now the young activists of *PESINDO* must begin to take seriously the task of modernizing the village. In particular, the 'feudal' nature of the *bengkok* system must be tackled head on. This was the heart of Javanese rural conservatism.

During May and June the FDR leaders devoted considerable efforts to forming a 'National Programme' with the PNI and MASJUMI, the basis for a national front. Agrarian reforms bulked largely in

(9) The Delanggu strike is most fully covered in J. Jahmin, "Kekuatan Sosial Kiri dan Persetudjuan Renville" (Unpublished skripsi sarjana, Gajah Mada University, 1971), pp. 46-61. See also Muhammad Dimiyati, *Sedjarah Perdjuangan Indonesia* (Jakarta, 1951), p. 168; G. McT Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 266.

(10) *Revolusioner*, 29 June 1948.

(11) *Ibid.*, 22 June 1948: "Demokrasi di Desa", by Sun. Gn.

the programme eventually negotiated on 21-24 June, even if their implications were far from clearly spelt out. A new agrarian law was proposed, based on private possession of land, "without ruling out the formation of collective or cooperative agricultural enterprises." Peasant land should be extended at the expense of "*erfpacht, klein-landbouw*, concessions, and state land which is clearly not in use." (12) During June FDR leaders held meetings throughout Republican Java popularizing moderate agrarian reforms of this type.

An explicit attack on the system of *bengkok* came only after the arrival of Musso in August 1948. On 4 September Musso told a BTI Congress in Yogyakarta:

"The agrarian revolution, the division of land to the peasants, must be carried out in this time of revolution. For this, the *desa* administration must first be democratized ... Feudal elements must be eliminated. *Bengkok* lands must be returned to the peasants to be worked by themselves." (13)

The way in which this was to be done had already been outlined in the *Jalan Baru* policy adopted by the PKI Politburo under Musso's guidance at the end of August. Explaining that the slogan "land for the peasants" could not be fulfilled because of the land shortage in Java, the statement concluded:

"... for the time being, the peasantry will be better helped by not dividing among them the lands which accrue to them as a result of the abolition of feudal forms in the agrarian sector. Rather, this land will be handed over to the village, and it will be the village which will regulate the allocation of this land and decide on the requests of the peasants in a manner which will benefit them." (14)

Action began immediately. From mid August the FDR/PKI press began reporting favourably on peasant action to take over and work for themselves former *bengkok* or other village land. "The peasant movement based on the National Programme is quietly gathering strength." (15) The National Programme's call for an abolition of

(12) The lengthy Program Nasional is in *Buruh*, 22, 23 and 25 June 1948.

(13) *Buruh*, 4 September 1948.

(14) Cited Ruth McVey, *The Soviet View*, pp. 65-66.

(15) *Buruh*, 30 August, 1948.

feudal relics on the land was now advanced to justify the abolition of bengkok, although no such radical proposal had in fact been agreed. A list of actions on the village land issue, in the order they were approvingly described in the FDR/PKI daily Buruh, indicates the type of policy being promoted in August-September 1948:

1. In Pajang (Surakarta), the *Sarekat Rakyat* (SR) began to work collectively 22 ha. of village land formerly auctioned each year by the *pamong desa* to the batik merchants of Lawean.
2. A desa in Boyoladi distributed 95 ha. of kas desa to landless peasants. (16)
3. Desas in Purbaya, Kudu, Siwal, Kadilanggu, and Pandean (all Surakarta Residency) decided that the kas desa and former *tanah-conversie* should be worked by landless peasants, who would keep 75% of the product for themselves.
4. In Patjitan (the coast south of Madiun) various desas led by the SR demanded that 110 ha. of state and forest land be distributed to peasants.
5. In Gunung Kidul the BTI demanded that tanah bengkok be distributed to peasants. (17)
6. A meeting of 500 representatives of 23 desas in the Kecamatan Adimulyo (Karanganyar, near Surakarta), on 11 September, confirmed the decision of the *pamong praja* and lurahs of the Kecamatan three days earlier to distribute 750 ha. of tanah bengkok to the people.
7. On 30 August tanah bengkok of the desa Tirtosari was surrendered, while 12 other desas, all in the Kedu Residency, followed this lead.
8. A model example of how to end the bengkok system was provided by the desa Leses (Kapanewon Manisrenggo, Yogyakarta). The *pamong desa* agreed to abolish 19 ha. of their bengkok, to be governed democratically by the village. This land would be worked by "the most diligent group, i.e. farm labourers and poor peasants", who would enjoy 2/3 of the product while the other 1/3 went into desa funds, to pay salaries to the *pamong desa*.

(16) Ibid., 21 August 1948.

(17) Ibid., 30 August 1948.

9. The desa Pasirharjo (Blitar), led by its lurah, divided land to poor peasants.
10. 400 plantation workers in Ngadirenggo (Wlingi), demanded, with SARBUPRI support, that 700-800 ha. of erfpacht of the foreign estate 'Gabru', be distributed. (18)

Whether such a programme could have succeeded without the military and political polarization which cut it short, is a matter for speculation. Already before this polarization crystallized into rebellion on 18 September, there was plenty of evidence of the bitterness which the campaign created in rural Java. On 7 September a BTI spokesman, Sadjarwo, complained in the BP-KNIP:

"Now that the peasant masses are acting to eliminate feudal elements in accordance with the National Programme, the Interior Minister [the MASJUMI leader Sukiman] has given secret instructions to use armed force to crush them." (19)

According to PESINDO sources, MASJUMI speakers at a rally in Lodojo (Blitar) on 12 September attacked the PKI programme of abolishing bengkok, and suggested MASJUMI members buy arms to protect themselves. The following day the leading leftists of Lodojo were arrested. (20)

Except in villages which were unusually homogeneous, the land reform campaign was conducted by abangan leaders of PESINDO, BTI, and SR, and opposed by santris. The rapidly deteriorating political situation in September 1948 ensured that it was conducted hastily. This was still more the case after the battle was joined on 18 September. In the Wonogiri-Sukoharjo area, which the communists controlled for several weeks, Dimyati states that "they divided sawah bengkok by force, as the beginning of the *revolusi sosial*." (21) There is evidence

(18) Ibid., 16 September 1948. Selosoemardjan, Social Changes in Jogjakarta (Ithaca, 1962), pp. 177-178, also mentions the brief BTI campaign to distribute *lungguh* (i.e. bengkok) to landless peasants. In general, however, his account emphasizes the hierarchic nature of Yogya society, and the reliance of the BTI itself on traditional vertical bonds rather than class conflict; see especially pp. 166-171.

(19) Buruh, 8 September 1948.

(20) Ibid., 18 September 1948.

(21) Muhammad Dimyati, op. cit., p. 203.

from various regions, however, that the programme degenerated into killing or capture of the richest members of a village, especially the lurah and wealthy santris, and plunder of their houses. (22) It appears to have contributed little to active support for the communist cause, and much to the hardening of *aliran* tensions.

(22) See especially Robert Jay, op. cit., pp. 27-29 and 73-76; and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Dia jang menjerah", in Tjerita dari Blora (Jakarta, 1952), pp. 277-340.